

# Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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The six hundred and seventieth meeting of the Club was held at the Criterion in Piccadilly, London, S.W.1 on Tuesday, 18th May, 1971 at 7 p.m.

*Chairman:* Dr. J. F. Monk; present: 17 members and 7 guests.

The speaker was Dr. J. J. M. Flegg who addressed the members on the Birds of St. Kilda and illustrated his address with coloured slides.

The meeting was preceded by the seventy-ninth annual general meeting of the Club, the minutes of which meeting will be published in a later issue of the Bulletin.

## Notes on *Terpsiphone* and *Coracina* spp. in the Malagasy region

by C. W. Benson

(PART II)

Received 24th January, 1971

There is in Cambridge an unsexed feathered nestling, collected by J. J. Lister on Praslin on 19th February 1888. It has wing 60, tail 20, culmen from base 14.5 mm. The plumage is wholly chestnut (with no sign of white on the abdomen as in the adult female), except for the primaries and their coverts, and the greater wing-coverts, which are dark brown, while the secondaries are dark brown margined with chestnut.

*T. corvina* now survives apparently only on La Digue. Penny (*Oryx*, 1968: 268) records it otherwise only from Praslin, where specimens were taken in 1865 (these are E. Newton's specimens, in Cambridge, and actually dated February 1867), and Marianne, where it was collected most recently by W. L. Abbott, in 1892. Vesey-FitzGerald (*Ibis*, 1940: 481) states that it "occurred very recently" on Praslin and Felicity, without further detail. Nicoll (*Ibis*, 1906: 708-709) indicates that he collected an adult male on Praslin, and another on Felicity, in April 1906. The British Museum register (1906. 12. 21. 287-289) shows that he collected three adults males, all on Praslin, but only one of them was found, from Praslin. According to Loustau-Lalanne (*Seychelles Soc. Occ. Publ.* 1, 1962), it occurred on Curieuse in 1906, but he gives no detail. From the foregoing evidence, only La Digue, Praslin and Marianne can be accepted for the occurrence (present or former) of *T. corvina*.

*Coracina* spp.

The genus *Coquus* was proposed by Sclater (*Ibis*, 1914: 174) for *Coracina typica* (Hartlaub) of Mauritius and *C. newtoni* (Pollen) of Réunion, in substitution for *Oxynotus* Swainson. Berlioz (1946: 60) has pointed out that *Coquus* is near to *Coracina*, even though there is no immediate relative in

\*On page 33, for "Vol. 91 No. 12" read "Vol. 91 No. 2".

Madagascar. Possibly *typica* and *newtoni* are of Asiatic origin, but have been long isolated. They are very distinct from *Coracina cinerea* (Müller) of Madagascar and the Comoros. Both show very well marked sexual colour-differences. Actually on the underside the female of *typica* shows a strong resemblance to that of *C. schisticeps* (Gray) of New Guinea, and likewise *newtoni* to another far eastern species, *C. tenuirostris* (Jardine), but this is presumably mere convergence. Berlioz suggests that *Coquus* bears some resemblance to the Asiatic genus *Lalage*, but I have not found any species to which *typica* or *newtoni* is particularly similar. Peters & Mayr (in *Check List of the birds of the world* 9, 1960) place *typica* and *newtoni* in *Coracina*. I see no reason to differ, though it is impossible to suggest their precise ancestry. To be sure, they are closely related to each other, though the differences (especially in the females) are such that they are best regarded as distinct species.

These differences were described by Pollen (1866), whose paper is accompanied by two good coloured plates, illustrating both sexes of the two species and the juvenile of *typica*. Nevertheless a fresh comparison, with some further detail, especially measurements, is appropriate. To this end, in addition to the material in London, Paris and Cambridge, Dr. G. F. Mees has most kindly provided measurements of that in the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Leiden, consisting of one male and two females of *typica*, and three males and five females of *newtoni*. Males of the two species are very similar in colour of plumage, though *newtoni* is a paler grey above. In both the outer webs of the secondaries are narrowly tipped and margined with white, but this is more pronounced in *typica*. Some specimens of *typica* have some rufous on the upperside, and one in Cambridge also has a band of rufous across the chest, and some rufous on the abdomen. This may be a sign of immaturity. Females are much more distinct, especially on the underside. Above, both are rufous brown, though *newtoni* is usually paler, and has a rather ill defined white superciliary, practically lacking in *typica*, and well pronounced white tips and margins to the outer webs of the secondaries, much less apparent in *typica* (this latter difference is the opposite to that in males). *Newtoni* also has the rump and upper tail-coverts barred with dusky, whereas *typica* is markedly reddish in this area, and unbarred. Below, the differences are striking. *Newtoni* is white narrowly barred with dusky, the bars only reduced or absent on the centre of the abdomen and the under tail-coverts; whereas *typica* is an immaculate rich ferruginous, with the chin white. The tips to the outer rectrices are white in *newtoni*, but white tinged tawny in *typica*.

There is an unsexed juvenile of *typica* in Cambridge, collected by E. Newton at Vacoa, Mauritius, on 31st December 1860. It is the subject of an editorial foot-note to Pollen (1866), and is illustrated in the same paper. It is similar to the adult female of *typica* above, but each feather is tipped with light fawn giving a barred appearance. It is white below, the chest tinged fawn, each feather having a dusky mesial streak, only almost lacking on the centre of the throat.

Measurements are given in Table 3. The wing-lengths indicate that *typica* is the larger species. The tail-lengths show much variability. They were all most carefully taken, and are considered a true reflection. Considering the overall figures, the tail-lengths are about the same, but the tail/wing ratio is appreciably higher in *newtoni*. A difference in the bill size is immediately apparent to the eye, and *typica* has the higher bill/wing ratio. For what is presumably the ecological counterpart, *Coracina cinerea*, Benson (1960a: 200)

gives the ratio as 19.0 in Madagascar, and in the Comoros as 20.7 on Moheli and 21.1 on Grand Comoro. Thus *typica* gives the highest ratio of all, but *newtoni* is little higher than *cinerea* in Madagascar.

A few words are necessary about type-material of *C. newtoni*. In accordance with the custom of that time, Pollen (1866) did not designate a type specimen. Nor did he state what material he had available. His paper is concluded with a date 17th February 1865. But as reference is made at the start to a notice in *Ibis*, 1865: 530 (i.e. the number for October 1865) of an earlier paper, it appears that there has been a misprint, and that the date should read 17th February 1866 (*newtoni* was described in the *Ibis* for July 1866, and this had been editorially predicted in the number for April 1866, p.224). In Leiden there are three males and four females of *newtoni* collected by Pollen and van Dam between January and May 1865; in London a male and a female collected by them in June 1865; likewise in Cambridge a male and a female in May 1865. These five males and six females should be regarded as syntypes. I am most grateful to Dr. Mees for his advice and assistance in this matter. The two Cambridge specimens should be added to the list of type material in *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.*, 1971: 4-6.

Table 3. Some measurements for *Coracina typica* and *newtoni*, in millimetres

Wing	Tail	Culmen from base
(1) <i>Coracina typica</i>		
♂♂ 102, 104, 105, 106, 106, 106, 107, 107, 107, 108, 110	72, 74, 75, 75, 76, 77, 77, 77, 77, 80, 84	21.5, 21.5, 22, 22, 22.5, 22.5, 23, 23, 23.5
♀♀ 107, 108, 108, 109, 109, 110, 110	73, 75, 78, 80, 90	22.5, 23, 23.5, 24, 24, 24.5
juv. 104	85	22
Overall averages: 107.0	77.9	22.8
(2) <i>Coracina newtoni</i>		
♂♂ 93, 93, 97, 97, 98, 98, 101, 101, 101, 102	74, 74, 77, 77, 79, 81, 81, 81, 84	17.5, 18.5, 18.5, 19, 19, 19, 19.5, 19.5, 19.5, 20
♀♀ 96, 96, 96, 97, 98, 98, 99, 99, 100, 101, 101, 102	73, 74, 74, 75, 75, 77, 79, 80, 81, 81, 87	17, 18, 19, 19, 19, 19.5, 20, 20, 21,
Overall averages: 98.3	78.2	19.1

$$\frac{100 \times \text{tail}}{\text{wing}} : 72.8 \text{ for } C. \textit{typica}, 79.4 \text{ for } C. \textit{newtoni}$$

$$\frac{100 \times \text{bill}}{\text{wing}} : 21.3 \text{ for } C. \textit{typica}, 19.3 \text{ for } C. \textit{newtoni}$$

Brief reference may be made to the affinities of *C. cinerea*. Hall & Moreau (1970: 55) have suggested that it forms part of an Afro-Asiatic super-species, but with *cinerea* and the Asiatic species unlike the African ones in having patterned tails. Indeed, in particular, the resemblance in colour and pattern as a whole between the males of the Malagasy and Grand Comoro forms of *C. cinerea*, and the male of *C. melanoptera sykesi* of India and Ceylon, is rather striking. Other examples of species found in Madagascar, of apparent Asiatic origin, are given by Berlioz (*Mém. Inst. Scient. Madagasc.* A, 1(2), 1948: 191), viz. in the genera *Ninox*, *Microscelis* (= *Hypsipetes*) and *Copsychus*.

#### Acknowledgement

I am grateful to P. G. H. Frost for reading this paper and drawing my attention to the paper by Selander (1966).

## Summary

1. Some aspects of variation in the forms of Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone* inhabiting islands in the western Indian Ocean are discussed. As with some species of other families, *T. mutata* is longer billed in the Comoros than Madagascar. This applies particularly to Anjouan, and is perhaps due to a lack of competitors, such as are more apparent on Grand Comoro. There is also a reduction in sexual dimorphism in colour and tail-length, except on Mayotte, the nearest of the Comoros to Madagascar. *T. bourbonnensis*, of the Mascarenes, is not particularly long-billed, but shows less sexual dimorphism than any form of *mutata*. Bill-length is proportionately no greater in *T. corvina* of the remote Seychelles than in some Comoro forms of *mutata*, and contrary to expectation sexual dimorphism is well marked. In all of these forms, not taking account of an extremely small sample of *T. b. bourbonnensis*, the bill/wing ratio is higher in the female than the male, the difference being greatest in *corvina* and least in *mutata* on Madagascar. The possible significance of this is not understood. Feathered nestlings of *T. bourbonnensis desolata* and *corvina* are described.

2. The differences between the Cuckoo Shrikes *Coracina typica* of Mauritius and *C. newtoni* of Réunion are described. Both are strongly sexually dimorphic in colour, and differences between the females of the two species are well marked. They may be of Asiatic origin, as is perhaps also *C. cinerea* of Madagascar and the Comoros, though *cinerea* does not appear particularly closely related to the Mascarene species. *C. typica* is the longest billed of the three species, while *newtoni* is little longer billed than *cinerea* in Madagascar and shorter billed than this species in the Comoros.

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## Status of *Lorius amabilis* Stresemann

by Joseph M. Forshaw

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Two species of *Lorius* have been recorded from New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago, New Guinea. *Lorius hypoinochrous* G. R. Gray is distributed from south-eastern New Guinea to the eastern Papuan Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago. The second species, *Lorius amabilis* Stresemann, is known only from the type, a female collected at Nakanai by P. Otto Meyer in August 1931. Peters (1937) lists this species without any comment, simply giving its range as New Britain.

In the course of working on New Guinea parrots I examined the type of *L. amabilis*. It was almost certainly a captive bird, because the primaries have been removed, a common practice among New Guinea people to prevent